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**TITLE OF THESIS**

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SUCCESS RATE OF POLICIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO ACCOMMODATE VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Migrants have rights by virtue of their humanity, and there are several international human rights that serve to address the protection of migrants in foreign countries under international human rights law. Venezuela, which lies on the northern coast of South America, has been experiencing a series of ongoing socio-economic and political crisis since 2010, and has heightened during the more recent years, forcing Venezuelans to flee. Caribbean twin islands Trinidad and Tobago, which lies just 11 kilometres of the northeast coast of Venezuela, has become a vulnerable destination for Venezuelans seeking to escape the plight of their country. During the period between 2015 till date, there has been a large number of Venezuelan migrants seeking refuge, protection and better standards of living in Trinidad and Tobago. International migrant organizations, however, have argued that Trinidad and Tobago are violating migrants' rights by failing to accommodate Venezuelan migrants with regards to granting said rights. Questionnaires and interviews carried out for the purpose of this study utilise data to explore the implementations of rights granted to Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago, and the extent to which these rights are successfully upheld. It focuses particularly on identifying the factors that have led to successful, somewhat successful, and unsuccessful policies that have been implemented by the local government, and how the success rates of these implemented policies have affected the lives of Venezuelan migrants. The findings of this study conclude that contrary to beliefs that Trinidad and Tobago is failing to accommodate Venezuelan migrants, the country has managed to successfully maintain most of its implemented migrant policies, while adhering to migrant human rights and the protection of state borders. The research paper also provides suggestions for local authorities and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) to adhere to in order to fulfil migrant rights in Trinidad and Tobago.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### *RATIONALE*

As an undergraduate student pursuing a degree in Spanish and a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I have always been intrigued by local news of Venezuelan migrants and refugees seeking refuge in Trinidad and Tobago. Many Venezuelan migrants and refugees claim that the government of Trinidad and Tobago is not enforcing adequate nor efficient policies associated with migrant and refugee matters, even indicating that Trinidad and Tobago may have been violating or ignoring policies issued by the United Nations Migration Agency: The International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since the deep humanitarian crisis in Venezuela occurred in 2015, Venezuelans have been seeking to escape the country's poor living conditions. Trinidad and Tobago, which neighbours South American Venezuela, is one of the many countries Venezuelans have been migrating to, seeking to earn a better standard of living.

The mingling of Trinbagonian citizens and Venezuelan migrants is certainly beneficial since migrants are generating contributions to the country's economy and labour force, as well as social and cultural contributions to the current overall structure of Trinidad and Tobago. Authorities of Trinidad and Tobago relay that the country has been very obliging and supportive towards Venezuelan migrants, however many also argue that the country's efforts in accommodating these immigrants are minimal and insufficient.

This research project intends to analyse the extent to which major migration policies have been successfully implemented by the government of Trinidad and Tobago to accommodate Venezuelan migrants, by examining data from local authorities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well the experiences of Venezuelan migrants currently residing throughout Trinidad and Tobago. With the accumulated information,

recommendations on rectifying and improving the Venezuelan migration situation in Trinidad and Tobago will be explored, along with the hopes of influencing more effective implementation of policies to accommodate Venezuelan migrants.

### *THESIS STATEMENT*

The government of Trinidad and Tobago has attempted to wholly accommodate a large influx of Venezuelan migrants with regards to adhering to the rights of migrants, despite being a small Caribbean country with limited resources. Due to this, implementations of policies have been labelled as either successful, partially successful, and unsuccessful.

### *OBJECTIVES*

This research project intends to identify the policies implemented by the government of Trinidad and Tobago that concern the accommodation of Venezuelan migrants currently residing in Trinidad and Tobago, and further categorize these policies according to the success rates of their implementations, and how the level of success for each policy impacts on Venezuelan migrants from an economic and socio-political perspective. The results produced from this study will serve to educate local citizens about the migration issue that Trinidad faces, as well as highlight the measures taken by the Trinbagonian government to accommodate the migrants, in addition to providing recommendations for more effective migration policies. The information from this study will hopefully influence authorities and migration organizations in Trinidad and Tobago to refine and supervise the implementation of migration policies implemented by the Trinbagonian government, and can also be useful to others conducting research on the topic of Venezuelan migrants in Trinbago.

## *PARAMETERS*

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only two individuals were interviewed, since the sample size was small. Questionnaires also could not be physically distributed to participants due to social distancing and needed to be distributed through online means instead. Data was also collected and analysed based on the responses of the 50 participants of a questionnaire and the two participants of the interview, which does not account for a full representation of all the Venezuelan migrants and local authorities in Trinidad and Tobago. The research project also focuses on the implementation of policies in Trinidad and Tobago concerning migrants from Venezuela only, and does not cater for the investigation of migrants of other nationalities.

## *METHODOLOGY*

A variety of methodologies was used in the data collection process which comprised both quantitative and qualitative methods. These methodologies consisted of a primary oral source in the form of an interview providing open ended and closed-ended questions with the aim of gathering qualitative data. The first interview transpired on November 07th, 2020 with an Immigration Officer who works at the Immigration Division of Trinidad and Tobago, while the second interview transpired on November 11th, 2020 with a Coordinator of the NGO Living Water Community. Each interview lasted for approximately 20 minutes, between the interviewer and the participant, which was recorded and afterwards, transcribed. This method allowed for flexibility in presenting and receiving responses, as well a more detailed and in-depth perspective from the respondents. In order to facilitate quantitative data, primary documentary sources through the form of questionnaires were sent online via the social media platform Facebook from the beginning of November 2020 to a group entitled “Venezolanos en Trinidad y Tobago” which consists of approximately 600 Venezuelan migrants and refugees

currently residing in Trinidad and Tobago. This method was convenient since a large sample size was available to access the questionnaires in the comfort of their homes. It also accounted for unbiased responses since random respondents were willing to complete the questionnaires. In total, 55 questionnaires were distributed online via this Facebook group, and of these 50 were completed.

Secondary documentary sources were also utilized in the forms of internet articles, newspapers, and websites, from which both quantitative and qualitative data were derived for this research project. This research method was easy to access and very time efficient. The approach to this research project consists of qualitative and quantitative data derived from the sources that were essential in proving the hypothesis that the government has been successful, partially successful, and unsuccessful in the implementation of certain policies with regards to Venezuelan migrant accommodation, which is represented through detailed descriptions in literature and statistical figures presented through charts, graphs and tables.

### *CHAPTER OUTLINE*

This research project consists of three chapters. The first chapter will explore the possible factors that have led to the successful/partially successful/unsuccessful implementation of migration policies dedicated towards Venezuelan migrants/refugees by the government of Trinidad and Tobago. The second chapter will focus on the economic and socio-political impacts on Venezuelan migrants of the policies implemented, partially implemented, or unsuccessfully implemented by the Trinbagonian government. The third and final chapter will present possible suggestions and recommendations with the aim of promoting more efficient and functional implementations by the Trinbagonian government to accommodate Venezuelan migrants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Migrants and refugees, whether documented or undocumented, have a right to life and liberty. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). According to the Advocates for Human Rights article entitled “The Rights of Migrants”, international human rights apply to all human beings, including the opportunity to enjoy basic human rights, regardless of immigration status. The article presents some of the fundamental rights that ought to be applied to all migrants and refugees:

- The right to seek safety and security in other countries from persecution.
- The right to be humanely treated with dignity and respect while in detention.
- The right to equal protection and a fair trial.
- The right to reunification with family, including spouses and children
- The right to live free from discrimination.
- The right to just working conditions such as fair wages and decent living.
- The right to enjoy their own culture, to practice their own religion and to practice their native language.
- The right to equal access to education.
- The right to medical care for the preservation of life through their health and well-being.
- The right to adequate housing.

The deep economic and humanitarian crisis in 2010 which has stemmed from Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro’s authoritarian regime has generated the continuous rise of unemployment, starvation, crime, and poverty among other disastrous living conditions in Venezuela.

The political crisis of Venezuela stems mainly from the disputed presidency. Nicolas Maduro was first elected in April 2013 after the death of his predecessor, Hugo Chavez. During Maduro's first term, the economy experienced free fall and neglect from his socialist government. He was then re-elected for a second six-year term in May 2018 in highly controversial polls which most opposition parties boycotted. Political corruption escalated as many candidates were prevented from running due to fear of persecution from the unfair poll which favoured Maduro. Many Venezuelans were not satisfied with Maduro's re-election, labelling him as a *dictadura* and instead placed recognition on Juan Guidó, who stepped in as leader of the opposition-controlled National Assembly in December 2018. Although Guidó does not wield much political power in practical terms, he has been recognized as the legitimate president by more than 50 countries. (BBC News, 2020). Yet, there are loyal countries and security forces that still stand with Maduro and continue to be key players in this crisis, providing Maduro with major military support. The presidential battle for legitimacy between Maduro and Guidó is a key factor of the political tension in Venezuela.

Venezuela's deteriorating state dates back to Chavez's reign (1999-2013), during which price controls were implemented to make basic goods like flour, cooking oil and toiletries more affordable to the poor, however, this resulted in the shortage and cessation of production since businesses were no longer gaining profits. Hyperinflation and the lack of investment in infrastructure heightened further by the recent United States' sanctions of Venezuela's oil sector, its main source of revenue, is another central factor that has exacerbated the country's economic crisis. During Maduro's reign, goods prices have tremendously increased and continue to do so.

This crisis has been the principal factor prompting Venezuelans to flee from these widespread issues and seek refuge in other states. Being one of the neighbouring islands, Trinidad and Tobago are among the countries to which Venezuelans migrate to escape political

persecution from their native country. A Caribbean nation of just 1.4 million, Trinidad and Tobago has struggled to deal with the influx of people from Venezuela, whose coast is just a few miles away. Trinidad and Tobago has received approximately 60 000 Venezuelans within the timeframe of 2015 to 2020, but the country has had very little success in providing support to these migrants. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Doctor Keith Rowley has emphasized that while the country is a limited island with limited space, “Trinidad’s message for Maduro is that we support him.” (Yagoub, 2019).

## *EDUCATION*

Matroo’s article entitled Garcia: Educating Refugee Children Not a Priority (2019) outlines Minister of Education Anthony Garcia’s decision to exclude the integration of Venezuelan migrant children from the public education system, thereby preventing migrant children from receiving educational opportunities or achieving recognized academic qualifications. Senior Newsday Reporter Carol Matroo points out that Garcia prioritizes the needs of local citizens first. “Our priority lies with our nationals. If however, there are occasions we can provide a place, certainly, but our priority must be with our nationals.” (Garcia, 2019). Garcia refuses to prioritize educational opportunities for migrant children despite pleas from Venezuelan migrants to do so. The right to an education is listed as a human migrant right in the Advocates for Human Rights’ article, and in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Education, therefore, the restriction of educational opportunities is a violation of said rights.

Nonetheless, the Trinidad and Tobago Situational Report article accounts for evidence that Venezuelan migrant children do receive private and informal education with the help of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). The report includes statistical and descriptive data. As well as plans involving workshops and the cooperation of local organizations and UN

agencies which demonstrates the effort made to provide Venezuelan children with their rights to education, but they do not enable children to graduate.

### *EMPLOYMENT*

In the article entitled *Forced into Illegality: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago* by Senior Humanitarian Advocate for UNICEF Melanie Teff indicates that the government of Trinidad and Tobago has approved some migration policies, such as the National Policy to Address Refugee and Asylum Matters in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 2015 to aid Venezuelan migrants and refugees, but has been failing to implement them. Teff insists that the lack of work permits is preventing migrants from accessing employment opportunities. For migrants, this further allows their susceptibility to vulnerable and exploitative work, such as prostitution among women. Some of the migrants that may have met the criteria to be granted their immigration status by the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are even regarded as ‘undocumented’.

On the contrary, Minister of National Security of Trinidad and Tobago Stuart Young highlighted the decision of the government to extend the work permit registration period of the original six months to an automatic grant of another six months to Venezuelan migrants. "The instructions I've given is that with respect to the expiry of the initial six months which may vary, that there will be an automatic six-month extension granted to all of those who have already been granted the first six months." (Young, 2019). On May 31st, 2019, the registration process for identification cards for Venezuelan migrants was launched by the government, which would permit migrants to work in Trinidad and Tobago for up to one year in total. Additionally, in the article entitled *Economist: Venezuelans will have a positive effect on work ethic*, Economist Terrance Farrell believes that the influx of the Venezuelan migrants will

positively benefit the economy. He describes the migrants as “people who are willing to work extremely hard” and compares them to the attitude of local citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who “have become very accustomed to operating in a rather more relaxed and lackadaisical kind of fashion.” In short, Farrell believes that the number of Venezuelan migrants will have an immense impact on the workforce and generate contributions and help sustain the country’s economic activities. “You obviously don’t want a sudden influx of people coming to a country because that puts a strain on your infrastructure.” (Farrell, 2019). He presents a balanced argument by advocating for limited immigration that benefits but does not harm the host country.

## *HEALTH*

With regards to healthcare, Trinidad and Tobago’s Minister of Health Terrance Deyalsingh declared that migrants “will receive the same free health care as nationals, particularly in relation to sexually transmitted diseases”. Deyalsingh assured the public that policies concerning healthcare are being successfully implemented. He reiterates that Venezuelan migrants/refugees have full access to health facilities to be tested and treated, free of charge. There should be no discrimination, no stigmatisation and no sensationalism of this public health issue and the government has taken a proactive stance to deal with it. (Deyalsingh, 2019).

Contrary to the declarations made by Health Minister Terrance Deyalsingh that Venezuelan migrants/refugees have been successful in receiving healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago, Visham Bhimull, Family Physician of the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association indicated in a Guardian article entitled Public Health and Asylum Seekers in Trinidad and Tobago (2020) that the country’s healthcare systems are poor and deficient. He explains that

apart from being vulnerable to diseases such as malaria, migrants/refugees suffer mainly with mental health issues due to post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety from experiencing the social and political crisis in Venezuela, as well as the xenophobic treatment they receive from locals. However, Bhimull's article lacks sufficient references and evidence to support his thesis, whereas Nakhid's article entitled *Protection in the Absence of Legislation: Forced Migration Review* utilises statistical data from UNHCR's observations to prove that free healthcare is provided to all Venezuelan migrants, rendering a successful implementation.

### *REGISTRATION*

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding and analysis of the topic, one should identify the successful migration policies facilitated to aid in managing the influx of Venezuelan migrants. Rochelle Nakhid and Andrew Welch's article entitled *Protection in the Absence of Legislation in Trinidad and Tobago (2017)* insists that Venezuelan migrants have been granted their rights in Trinidad and Tobago. The authors outline the rights that have been granted to these migrants based on the Refugee Policy approved in June 2014. Those rights include "a permit which authorizes their stay in the country, the right to work, to identity papers, travel documents, public assistance, medical care, freedom of movement, family reunification, educational opportunities and recreational activities." Knight's article entitled *Remembering the Golden Rule in Accommodating Venezuelan Refugees (2019)* highlights that by allowing Venezuelan migrants to register, Trinidad and Tobago have been accommodating and is providing international security to Venezuelan migrants whose lives are at risk. Knight also credits the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for implementing the registration system to track newcomers and aid Venezuelan migrants with gaining temporary legal residency.

## *RIGHTS IN TRIALS AND DETENTION*

Once more, Teff's article *Forced into Illegality: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago* argues that there is 'no domestic legislation for refugees and asylum seekers'. A lack of migration policies and the failure of some of the existing migration laws to provide migrants with sufficient rights and assistance is quite evident. "As of November 2018, an estimated 440 people were in detention in Trinidad and Tobago, where they lack adequate access to legal assistance and medical care. There have been no panels organized to independently monitor conditions of detention." (Teff, 2019) Additionally, Louise Tillotson's article entitled *Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela: Policies from both governments put lives at risk*, supports Teff's earlier claim by emphasizing that the government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to hide behind the excuse that it has no national refugee legislation. He continues by reiterating the fact that despite Venezuelan migrants fleeing from their native country to survive, the government arrests, detains or deports them for 'committing criminal offenses', which undeniably violates international human rights law. Tillotson incorporates numbers to support his claim; "Trinidad and Tobago's authorities sent at least 16 children and an estimated 12 adults back out into the high seas, after they'd arrived in Trinidad and Tobago seeking safety." (Tillotson, 2019). The author stands firm that the country is failing to condemn the human rights violations in Venezuela, and Trinidad and Tobago's authorities have prioritized a response focused on 'protecting national security' and 'border protection' rather than finding ways to fulfil its human rights commitments.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **FACTORS THAT HAVE LED TO THE SUCCESSFUL, PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF MIGRATION POLICIES.**

To explore the aim of the first chapter, the global and fundamental human migrant rights that ought to be implemented through policies must firstly be identified and then categorized based on the extent of how successful Trinidad and Tobago has been in implementing these policies. Possible explanations should then be given as to why they have been successful, partially successful, or unsuccessful.

Based on the accumulation of varying research articles and sources, two major migrant policies have been found to be successfully implemented in Trinidad and Tobago. The first includes: the right to medical care for the preservation of life through their health and well-being. (Advocates for Human Rights, 2020). As of Monday, March 11th, 2019, Minister of Health Terrance Deyalsingh stated; “On the issue of migrants, we have taken a decision in Trinidad and Tobago, you know we have Venezuelan migrants, to treat them as nationals. Because migrants don’t live in isolation in the countries they migrate to. They mix with the rest of the population; they integrate themselves with the environment so we have taken a policy decision at the Ministry of Health to treat all migrants regardless of their country of origin as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago when it comes to public health.” (Deyalsingh, 2019). Therefore, Venezuelan migrants can access medical services that include treatment for acute medical conditions such as injuries, accidents, heart attacks, stroke, and asthma among many others, as well as relevant diagnostics for acute care.

Public health services such as immunization, treatment of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and high-risk infectious diseases such as malaria are provided for

any non-national of Trinidad and Tobago. While there have been challenges such as delays in attendance, language barriers, transportation costs, and limited clinic hours, the government quickly counteracted these challenges by increasing the number of clinical services available during evenings and on Saturdays in Port of Spain, San Fernando and Tobago, noted in an interview conducted with Rochelle Nakhid, Coordinator of the Living Water Community (LCW), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that provides support and aid to migrants. Health care services were combined with health communication strategies for Venezuelans to be able to access information on available health services and encourage healthy behaviours, through a WhatsApp group used to share relevant health information with Venezuelans. “Additionally, sexual and reproductive health services were provided to 113 Venezuelans, and 34 received psychosocial counselling, 19 of whom had experienced gender-based violence.” (Nakhid, 2020). Such factors have led to an efficient and successful implementation of healthcare as a migrant policy.

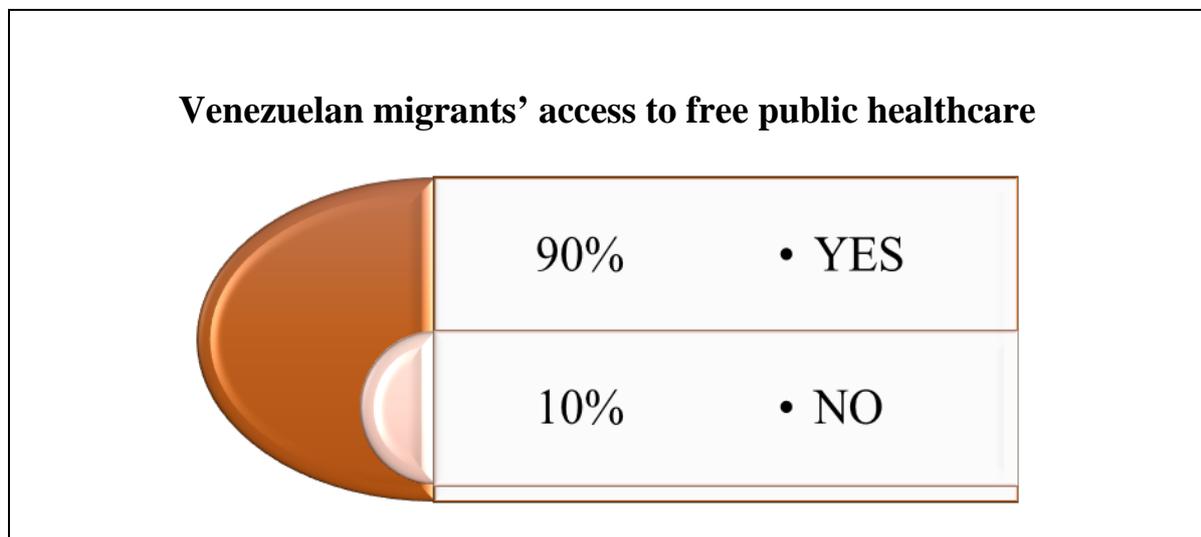


Figure 1: Diagram displaying the percentage of Venezuelan migrants’ access to free public healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago.

The other successful migrant policy implemented is the decision of the government to register the Venezuelan migrants. This implementation unquestionably allows migrants to seek safety in the host country, away from the ongoing turmoil that continues to transpire in Venezuela. Trinidad and Tobago has a fairly stable economy thanks to its oil, natural gas, and petrochemical industries and is one of Venezuela's nearest neighbours, separated only by only seven miles. There is no question that Trinidad and Tobago with a population of 1.369 million and a land mass of 5,131 km is completely overwhelmed by its close neighbour, Venezuela, with its population of 31.98 million and a land mass of 916,455 km. (Knight, 2019). Instead of turning away these migrants who are fighting to survive by escaping their home country, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Doctor Keith Rowley recognized this international legal principle and took the decision to implement a registration system to track the newcomers and allow them to gain temporary legal residency as well as employment opportunities on the island, which contradicts the Prime Minister's remarks "We are a little island — limited space — and therefore we cannot and will not allow the U.N. spokespersons to convert us into a refugee camp." (Tillotson, 2019). The registration process would allow Venezuelan's access to protection from the authorities and would help stop human trafficking. (Young, 2020). In the interview with Keith Sampson, an Immigration Officer at the Immigration Division of Trinidad and Tobago, (See Appendix 3, Interview 1), Mr. Sampson referred to the instructions given by Minister of National Security Stuart Young in a post Cabinet briefing with regards to the registration period; a six-month extension of the work permit program was granted as part of the incentives of registering. This was an automatic advancement in accommodating Venezuelan migrants. The registration period lasted from May 31st, 2019 to June 14th, 2019, from 7am to 5 pm. (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2019). All of these factors accounted for a successful attempt at implementing migrant policies that allowed

Venezuelan migrants safe residence in Trinidad and Tobago and protection from authorities of Venezuela.

While free healthcare and the opportunity to seek protection and safety in Trinidad and Tobago were found to be the most successful policies implemented by the government, the right to education and employment were evaluated to be only partially successful. Equal access to education and just working conditions such as fair wages and decent living are two of the fundamental rights that should be applied to migrants. (Rights of a Migrant, 2020). Trinidad and Tobago has denied Venezuelan nationals the right to be integrated in the public education system. During a news conference on Thursday 04th, June 2019, Minister of Education Anthony Garcia stood firm in his decision: “The policy of the Government is that we cannot guarantee any placement for any Venezuelan child. Our priority lies with our nationals. If, however, there are occasions we can provide a place, certainly, but our priority must be with our nationals” (Garcia, 2019). This lack of access to education, especially to children of Venezuelan migrants, is definitely a concern as it violates the tenets of international law. Trinidad and Tobago acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires compulsory primary education that is free to all. The right to education for all children is also highlighted under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a vital right.

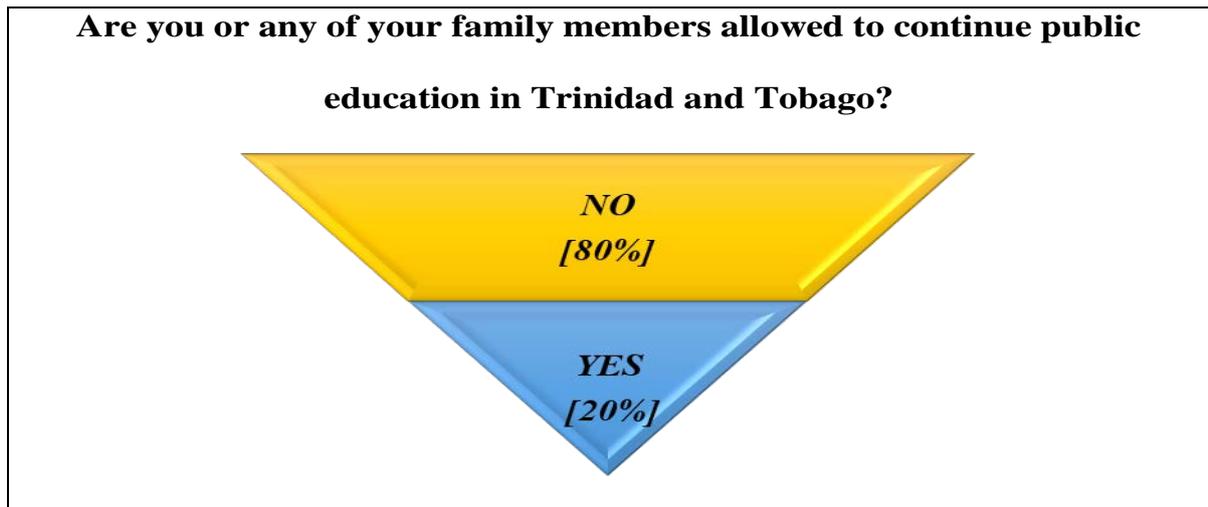


Figure 2: Diagram displaying the percentage of Venezuelan migrants’ access to free education in Trinidad and Tobago.

It is contradictory of the government of Trinidad and Tobago to deny Venezuelan migrant children this right, however, thanks to efforts from various NGOs, the country has managed to provide a safe space for Venezuelan nationals to receive education. While Venezuelan migrants may not have access to public education, they do have the opportunity to gain access to education through the efforts of NGOs. The NGO Living Water Community made progress in their laudatory efforts to permit this right to Venezuelan migrants, a right that has been denied by the government. Rochelle Nakhid of the LWC elaborated on their achievements: “Living Water Community has partnered with many other NGOs, and even IGOs (International Governmental Organizations) including the UNHCR (United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees). To give more specific data, we have managed to provide access to formal education to 41 Venezuelan children, 14 of whom were girls and 27 who were boys. 101 children benefited from access to early childhood development activities through a home visiting program. We allowed children under the age of 5 to undergo nutritional screening to promote healthy infant feeding practices among parents and caregivers.” In this regard, the

government of Trinidad and Tobago has failed to implement education as a migrant policy, but Venezuelan migrants are still able to receive some form of education by virtue of NGOs and IGOs, hereby rendering the implementation of this right as partially successful.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago has also been partially successful with regards to the right to employment. It is true that the government implemented a work permit programme for registered Venezuelan migrants with a duration of 12 months (See Appendix 2) starting from May 31st, 2019, and this was one of the most commended endeavours taken by the local government. Certainly, this has led to a somewhat successful implementation of employment opportunities as a migrant policy, however, there are challenges that have limited the extent of this success. While Venezuelan migrants have been granted to opportunity to work, the wages and working conditions are mostly deplorable. Venezuelan workers are exploited by employers; often receiving a salary that is below the minimum wage, or even receiving no pay at all. They are used as a source of cheap labour, with a lack of respect for their rights and no regards to their safety conditions at the workplace. Venezuelan women, especially, are often faced with sexual abuse at work. In the interview with Rochelle Nakhid, she describes: “Employers promise work and after one week, Venezuelan workers are not paid. Employers keep migrants working from 6 am to 10 pm in the night with nothing to eat.” (Nakhid, 2020). Because of the common stereotype that Venezuelan women are prostituting themselves to gain an income, they are often harassed and threatened in public spaces including public transportation, health centres and supermarkets. Therefore, it can be said that the government has been successful in granting employment opportunities but has ignored the unsafe workspace where exploitation of migrant workers is rampant.

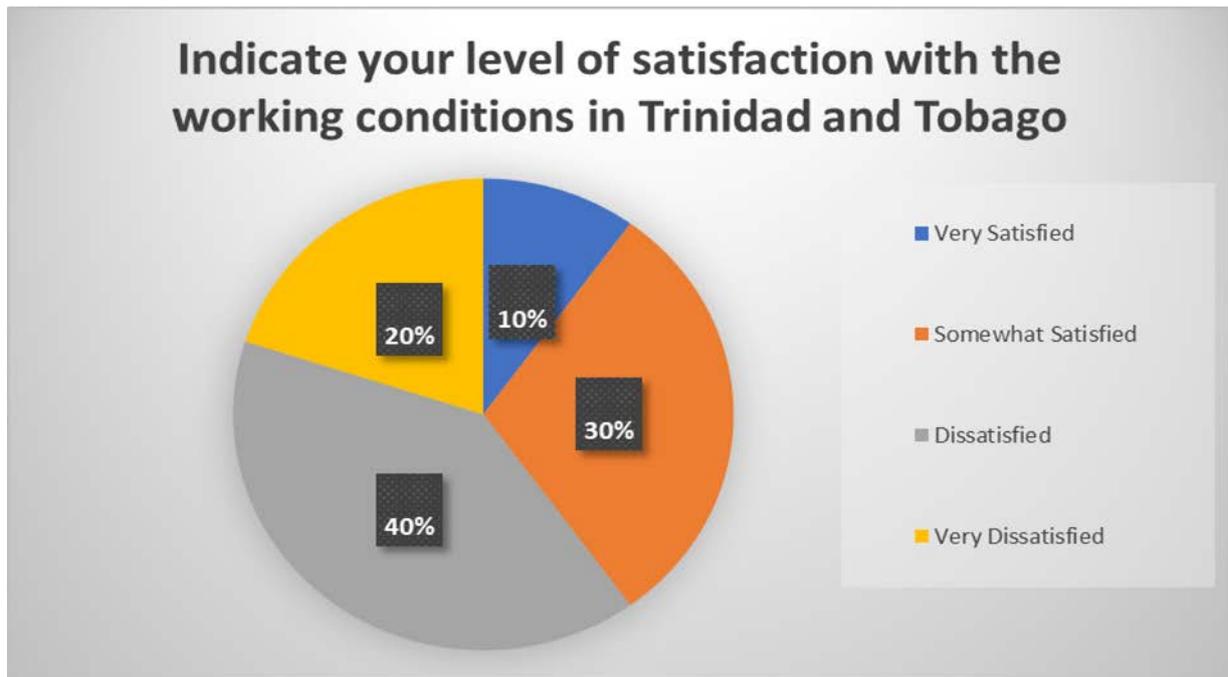


Figure 3: Pie chart displaying the level of satisfaction of Venezuelan workers with the working conditions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Unfortunately, Venezuelan migrants have also been denied some of their rights through the government of Trinidad and Tobago’s failed migrant policies. These policies would include the right to adequate housing and the right to be humanely treated with dignity and respect while in detention as well as the right to equal protection and a fair trial. (Rights of a Migrant, 2020). The right to adequate housing is limited by a simple factor: Trinidad and Tobago is a small island, comprising just 1.3 million people, and is continuing to experience a high density of migrants and influx of Venezuelans immigrating to it. The government is doing what it can to accommodate the migrants, but the reality is that the twin island nation lacks adequate infrastructure to allow migrants residence. Venezuelan migrants tend to find residence in urban areas such as Port-of Spain or Chaguanas since they are more likely to receive employment opportunities in the cities than in the rural areas.

Additionally, the government of Trinidad and Tobago has failed to implement equal rights to Venezuelan migrants in trials as well as protection and respect in detention centres. It is the duty of immigration agencies to comply with the rules of detention and deportation with regards to unregistered and illegal migrants, however, migrants who are registered often face abuse and injustice too. The agencies refuse to acknowledge their registered status and consider them ‘undocumented’. Migrants are denied legal assistance and even medical care within detention compounds. There is a lack of independent supervision of the conditions in these detention centres, and little access granted to third parties to observe detainees’ conditions and treatment. A registered Venezuelan immigrant shared his experience in Trinidad and Tobago’s Immigration Detention Centre in a report; “They say the IDC is just detention, not prison, but it felt like prison to me. There were two very overcrowded dormitories, with 18 beds in each. There was no natural light. We were only allowed to go outside for 15 minutes once or twice a week...Very sick detainees were denied necessary medical treatment.” (Refugees’ International Status Report, 2019). Venezuelan migrants also insist that there are immigration officers and members of the judiciary who fail to understand or respect the existing rules and rights associated with migrants. This inefficiency of the immigration agencies is certainly a factor that renders this migrant policy unsuccessful.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPACTS ON VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS DUE TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED, PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED OR UNSUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED POLICIES**

Consequently, the migration policies implemented by the government of Trinidad and Tobago have generated both positive and negative impacts on Venezuelan migrants, however, this chapter will only seek to highlight these impacts from the economic and socio-political perspectives. In the previous chapter, granting free medical healthcare and services, as well as the opportunity to seek safety and protection from the crisis in Venezuela and reside in Trinidad in Tobago, have been deduced as the most successful migrant policies dedicated towards migrants' accommodation. Venezuelan migrants have access to free public health care, and undoubtedly, this alleviates some of their economic burdens.

#### **Why did you choose to emigrate to Trinidad and Tobago?**

<b>Better climate</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>To escape political oppression in Venezuela</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>To gain a better standard of living</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>To reunite with family in Trinidad and Tobago</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Touristic Purposes</b>	<b>10%</b>

Figure 4: Table displaying the main reasons why Venezuelan migrants emigrated to Trinidad and Tobago.

The economic and socio-political stability of Venezuela is drastically collapsing, evident in the scarcity of medical healthcare, food and jobs, as well as the increase in corruption, street violence and high death rates. Fortunately, Venezuelan migrants receive free healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago, and as such, a major expense is avoided. It is difficult for migrants who are already on the verge of poverty to survive; as expenses are mainly catered to nutrition, accommodation, private education for migrant children, and others. Therefore, migrants who cannot afford to pay healthcare fees receive equal quality of services. From a socio-political view, access to free health care increases migrants' life expectancy rates. Migrants in particular, are prone to higher risks of infection and contamination of diseases, due to exposure from travelling. However, access to free health allows migrants to be better aware of their health conditions, receive treatment, and lead a healthier life to contribute to their survival and the development of their host country.

With regards to permitting safety and security to Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago, the government has been successful in this policy implementation, and this has impacted positively on Venezuelan migrants, especially from an economic point-of-view. As mentioned before, Venezuelans are being denied basic human rights in their home country. “The illegitimate regime of Nicolás Maduro has thrust 96 percent of Venezuelans into poverty.” (Kirschner, 2020). The crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela has forced Venezuelans to flee, and as a response, the government of Trinidad and Tobago, faith-based organizations, and NGOs have deployed to welcome and accept Venezuelan migrants in need of international protection. Trinidad and Tobago has a high-income and stable economy with a decent standard-of-living. Venezuelans stand a better chance of survival in Trinidad and Tobago, as they have not only been granted safety and security, but employment opportunities, which will help elevate their poor economic situations.

The granting of residence to Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago has had some socio-political impacts. More and more Venezuelans are migrating to the twin island nation, penetrating the local population. The presence of Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago are becoming the norm, as they are now an addition to the races of the country, and a crucial aspect of the composure of this multinational society. This integration with Trinbagonian society has led to mixed views; while they have been accepted by the government, they face contempt and discrimination by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, who insist that the increase of Venezuelan migrants seeking safety and residence in the country will lead to overpopulation and competition for employment opportunities and the rise of crime include human and drug trafficking.

The partially successful policies targeted towards accommodating Venezuelan migrants, implemented by the government of Trinidad and Tobago included the right to education opportunities and the right to employment opportunities. The previous chapter explored the reasons behind these policies being partially successful, which will now lead to an examination of how these policies have affected Venezuelan migrants. With regards to education, Venezuelans are not granted access to free public education, as determined by the government of Trinidad and Tobago, however, they do have access to private education. Local NGOs, like the Living Water Community for example, have made laudable efforts and attempts to ensure that Venezuelan migrants and children receive an education. The language barrier certainly proves to be challenging, since many Trinbagonians cannot speak Spanish, while many Venezuelans cannot speak English.

The lack of opportunities to receive free mandatory education, especially with regards to learning the native language of Trinidad impacts negatively on Venezuelan migrants and children. Children of Venezuelan migrants must now grow up without the opportunity to study, due to this particular policy, and cannot continue their education and training, which

impedes their academic progress. Their capacity to pursue, develop or complete their academic qualifications is undoubtedly strained. Generally, the lack of educational opportunities to Venezuelan migrants prevents effective communication among society. These impacts suggest that children of migrants do not have the same social conditions as the rest of children in Trinidad and Tobago. On the other hand, receiving private education from NGOs allows Venezuelan migrants and children to develop and continue their academic skills, which was disrupted following the emigration from Venezuela. This opportunity has helped migrants to settle in and adapt to Trinidad and Tobago. Economically speaking, when migrants are granted access to education, they can develop their skills and competence in society, contribute in the labour market, secure decent job opportunities, and earn a higher income based on their academic qualifications, elevating their standards of living. It should be noted that these positive impacts have manifested mainly thanks to NGOs, since the government has denied free public education to migrants.

Additionally, the partially successful policy implemented by the Trinbagonian government that allows Venezuelan migrants access to employment opportunities have had positive effects on migrants. Employment opportunities have generated a household income to Venezuelan workers, who use the opportunity to elevate their quality of life and alleviate themselves from poverty and from the degrading economic and socio-political conditions they have suffered in Venezuela. However, Venezuelan migrants have been victims of unfair working conditions and exploitation in the workplace, as mentioned before in the previous chapter. Without the rights to fair wages and working conditions, migrants are forced into exploitative work, such as prostitution, with regards to female migrants. As a result, there have been increased reports of gender-based violence, as well as an increased risk of STDs and HIV/AIDS.

The failure of policies implemented by Trinidad and Tobago which includes the right to adequate housing and accommodation for Venezuelan migrants have some economic and socio-political impacts on migrants. The government has been courteous to extend a welcome to the influx of Venezuelans seeking residence in Trinidad and Tobago, but the country lacks the infrastructure to accommodate the increasing amounts of migrants. Many Venezuelans are then forced to rent, which results in an economic burden in their budgets. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the government was forced to take measures to curtail the spreading of the virus, which included travel bans, complete border closure, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and lockdown. Consequently, many businesses and facilities were closed, including bars and restaurants, where Venezuelan migrants mostly seek jobs. “Hundreds of Venezuelans who work at bars, restaurants and hotels face the risk of being evicted from their apartments after being out of work.” (Alvarado, 2020).

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH THE AIM OF PROMOTING MORE EFFICIENT AND FUNCTIONAL IMPLEMENTATIONS FOR MIGRANTS**

Ultimately, the flow and number of Venezuelans migrating to the twin island nation Trinidad and Tobago is something that is inevitable, and will continue to increase as the political, economic, and social conditions of Venezuela continue to deteriorate. The government of Trinidad and Tobago has facilitated some migration policies to accommodate these migrants, however, there is room for speculation in relation to the extent of their successful implementation. To efficiently manage Venezuelan migrants and ensure their accommodation while simultaneously adhering to Human Rights and protecting borders, a number of alterations and recommendations need to be gradually carried out.

#### ***BREAKING DOWN LANGUAGE BARRIERS: EDUCATION***

The language barrier poses a challenge for many Spanish-speaking Venezuelans who cannot speak English. This difference in language is a principal issue which limits communication. Communication is essential to human life in society as it facilitates the process of sharing information and knowledge among people. Regardless of nationality, all children should have access to education. Therefore, the government should permit the incorporation of Venezuelan children into the public education system and should not deny them opportunities to learn and continue their academic studies. Special language learning programs ought to be

facilitated to teach English to Venezuelans, which could be classified by primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

#### *COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS*

The government of Trinidad and Tobago can invest in information systems that enable UN agencies to collect relevant data on the numbers of migrants, their skills, and their specific vulnerabilities and needs. “Trinidadian officials estimate as many as 60,000 Venezuelans have settled in Trinidad though this figure could be much greater. That might not sound like a lot of people, but Trinidad is small. We are composed of just 1.3 million people. Proportionate to its population, Trinidad has received more Venezuelans than any other country.” (Dash, 2019). Trinidad and Tobago should explore the option of an agreement with other CARICOM members to help ease the burden placed on the twin island nation. This approach can benefit the regional economies if migrant laborers are rotated in work programs among the regional Caribbean countries, contributing in the labor market while at the same time, securing a way to provide for themselves. Due to the small size of the host country, the limited number of resources to help accommodate Venezuelan migrants is an issue. Thus, global migration organizations such as the IOM (International Organization for Migrants) or UNHRC (United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees), among others, can cooperate with the government of Trinidad and Tobago to help provide resources and alleviate the burden on the country.

#### *EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR LAWS*

While the government of Trinidad and Tobago has implemented a yearlong work programme for legal and registered Venezuelan migrants, there are still many migrants who

are paid below the low minimum wage, or forced into extreme exploitative work, such as prostitution. On the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago's website, the FAQ: Venezuelan Migrant Registration Process clearly states, "Employers must comply with the country's labour laws, including payment of no less than the minimum wage." Businesses and employers should consider the need and the importance of translators or bilingual individuals in the workplace to ensure efficient and effective communication between local employers and Venezuelan migrants.

More investigations should be launched to ensure that local employers are adhering to the employment laws of Trinidad and Tobago and following the protocols of the Minimum Wage Act and to identify any mistreatment or violation of employment rights against migrants. Educative programs should provide information to both local employers and Venezuelan employees about work ethics and morals, labor laws, and human rights violations, so that both parties would be better aware of the rights of migrant workers and the persecution that follows if these rights are denied.

### *RESIDENCE*

Venezuelan migrants are already underpaid for their labour, and most migrants have no option but to rent due to the lack of residential accommodation. Renting requires a considerable amount of money from a migrant's budget, which lessens the amount that must be catered for other important aspects, such as providing meals for one's family. The government can therefore develop infrastructure in order to accommodate these Venezuelan migrants and provide an avenue to apply for short-term residence. Furthermore, to prevent overcrowding in the urban areas, the government should invest in expanding communities to the rural areas to help integrate Venezuelan migrants.

## *RIGHTS IN TRIALS AND DETENTION CENTRES*

One of the findings presented in Chapter 2 was the inequality and unfair treatment experienced by Venezuelan migrants in relation to legal rights, including the rights to a fair trial or respect in detention. Certain policies ought to be put in place to prevent unequal rights in trials and detention. Frequent investigations must be done on detention compounds to ensure that migrants are not mistreated in detention. The government can also invest in systematic training for members of the judiciary, police, and immigration officials to promote a better understanding and education of the detention process and migrant rights. Access to the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in Trinidad and Tobago is limited, which should be altered so that access is available to the IDC and immigration detainees held in these institutions for medical personnel, lawyers, and staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Translators should always be available in the case of communication barriers.

## CONCLUSION

The findings and data derived from the primary and secondary sources of this study were very interesting. Contrary to beliefs that Trinidad and Tobago is failing to successfully accommodate Venezuelan migrants, the country has managed to successfully maintain most of its implemented migrant policies, while adhering to migrant human rights and the protection of state borders. The country is commendable in its efforts to somewhat provide for and assist such a large population of Venezuelan migrants despite its small size and limited resources.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago must analyse all areas in which they can accommodate Venezuelan migrants, in order to maintain their successful migrant policies, improve the partially successful migrant policies, and perhaps alter the migrant policies that have been unsuccessful. It is crucial to remember that Trinidad and Tobago signed on to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention in November 2001, indicating its consent to be bound by the treaty. Unsuccessful migration policies such as denying Venezuelan migrant children the right to education or denying detainees fair treatment in trials and detention centres are, without a doubt, violations of said treaty and the Human Rights of migrants. According to the late General-Secretary of the United Nations Kofi Annan, “Migrants cannot be stopped, but they can and must be managed better, more humanely, protecting migrants’ rights while accepting states’ rights to control their borders.” As such, equal importance must be given to all migration policies to ensure that the country grants human rights among migrants.

Allowing Venezuelan migrants shelter and safety in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as access to free healthcare, are the most successful migrant policies undertaken by the country's government. The provision of employment opportunities and education are partially successful migration policies, while the lack of residential accommodation and the unjust treatment of registered migrants with regards to trials and detention centres have been labelled as the least

successful migration policies implemented by Trinidad and Tobago. The extent of success had both positive and negative political and socio-economic impacts on the migrants, and the host country. Improving the effectiveness of migrant policies implemented by the government of Trinidad and Tobago would ensure a regular and smooth flow of registered Venezuelan migrants, a valuable addition to the country's workforce which would benefit the country's economy, as well as praise for adhering to the human rights allowed to migrants.

The increasing numbers of Venezuelans that will seek refuge in the neighbouring Trinidad and Tobago is inevitable and almost unstoppable. It is therefore imperative to attempt all efforts to ensure that these migrants are allowed rights to efficient healthcare, employment, education, shelter, fair trials and treatment, and social services, through better and more effective implementations. Migrants are an asset to every country, but they are also human beings who deserve the right to survive, the right to life.

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## APPENDICES

### **Appendix 1:**

#### *Questionnaire*

#### **Venezuelan Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago**

Indicate your sex

- Male    Female

Indicate your age group

- 15-19    20-29    30-39    40-49    50 +

How long have you been residing in Trinidad and Tobago?

- Less than a year    2-3 years    4-5 years    More than 5 years

Select the main reasons why you chose to emigrate to Trinidad and Tobago.

- To gain a better standard of living    Better climate    Touristic purposes
- To escape political oppression in Venezuela
- To reunite with family in Trinidad and Tobago    Other

What is the general attitude of Trinbagonians towards Venezuelans?

- Friendly and accommodating     Indifferent     Discriminatory  
 Sympathetic     Other

How helpful has the government of Trinidad and Tobago been in accommodating Venezuelans?

- Very helpful     Helpful     Not very helpful     No help was provided

Indicate your level of satisfaction residing in Trinidad and Tobago.

- Very satisfactory     Somewhat satisfactory     Unsatisfactory  
 Very unsatisfactory

Has the government of Trinidad and Tobago made promises to you or your family members?

- Yes     No

If you indicated yes to the previous question, have you or your family members received said promises?

- Yes     No

Are you allowed to practice your own religion and culture in Trinidad and Tobago?

- Yes     No

Are you employed?

- Yes     No

If you indicated yes to the previous question, what is your status?

- I work for the government     I am self-employed     I work for local citizens  
 All of the above

Indicate your level of satisfaction with the working conditions in Trinidad and Tobago.

- Very satisfactory     Somewhat satisfactory     Unsatisfactory  
 Very unsatisfactory

Are you allowed to work for the government of Trinidad and Tobago?

Yes       No

If you indicated yes to the previous question, what are the terms?

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Are you or any family members allowed to continue public education in Trinidad and Tobago?

Yes       No

Do you have access to public healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago?

Yes       No

If you indicated yes to the previous question, what is your level of satisfaction with the healthcare provided?

Very satisfactory     Somewhat satisfactory     Unsatisfactory  
 Very unsatisfactory

Indicate your residential situation.

The government has provided free housing     I am renting     Other

How safe do you feel in Trinidad and Tobago?

Very safe     Safe     Unsafe     Very unsafe

Do you believe that the government of Trinidad and Tobago should take more measures to accommodate Venezuelan migrants?

Yes       No

If you indicated yes to the previous question, what measures what you recommend?

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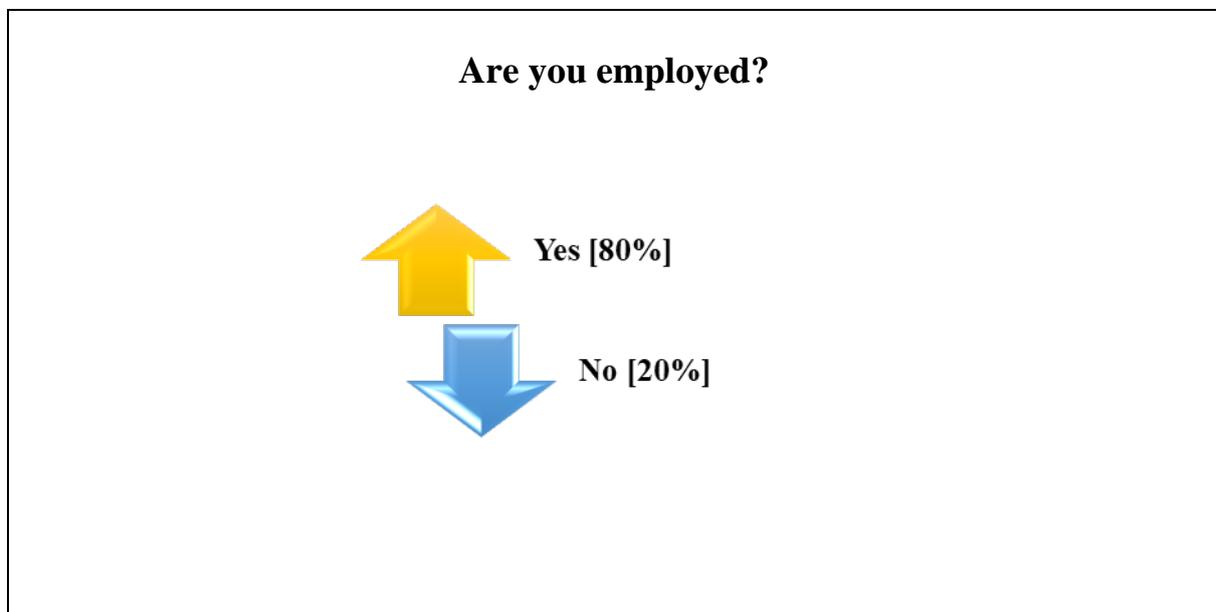
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## Appendix 2:

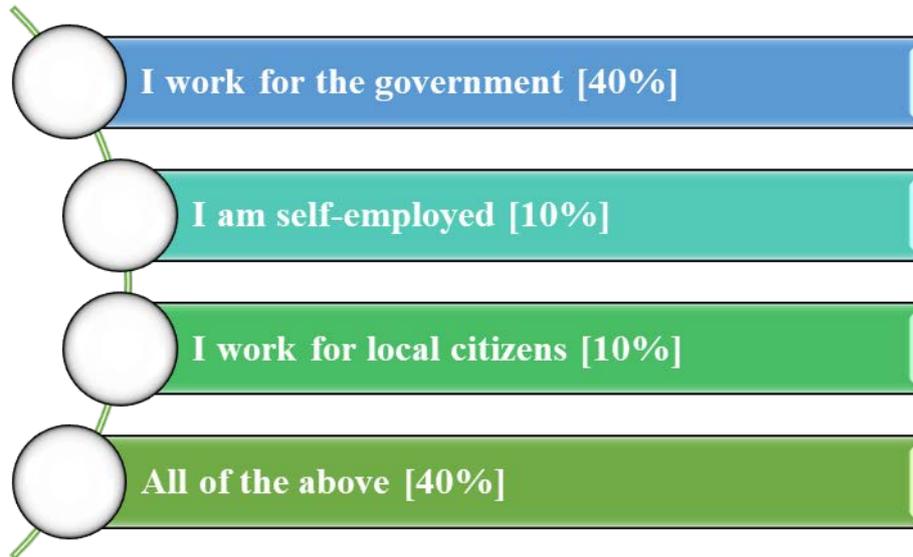
### Summary Responses

Select the main reasons why you chose to emigrate to Trinidad and Tobago

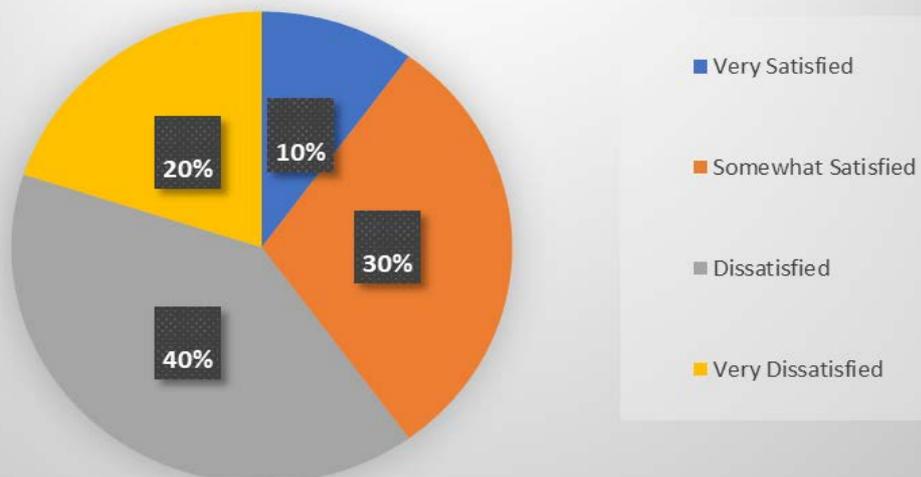
Better climate	0%
Other	0%
To escape political oppression in Venezuela	30%
To gain a better standard of living	50%
To reunite with family in Trinidad and Tobago	10%
Touristic Purposes	10%



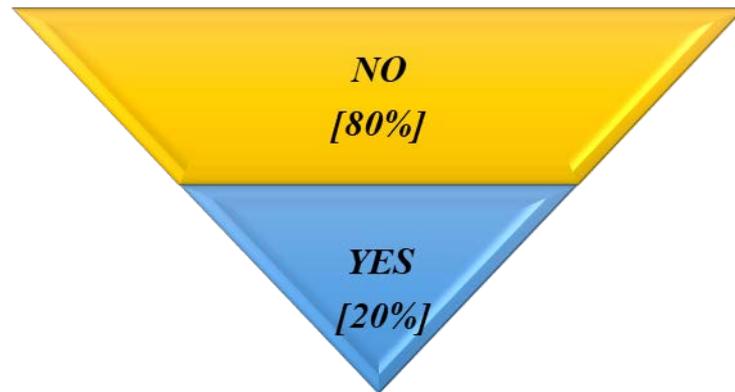
**If you indicated yes to the previous question, what is your status?**



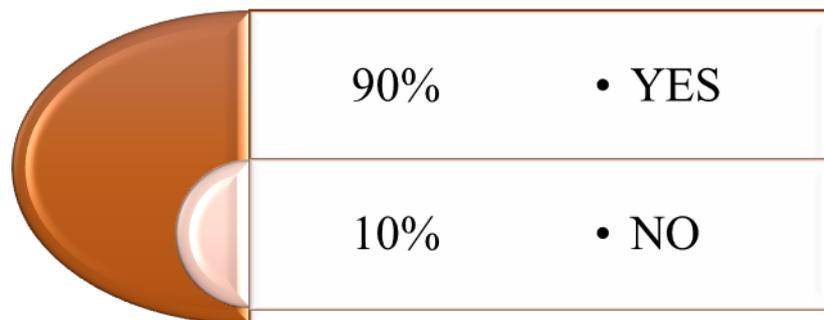
**Indicate your level of satisfaction with the working conditions in Trinidad and Tobago**



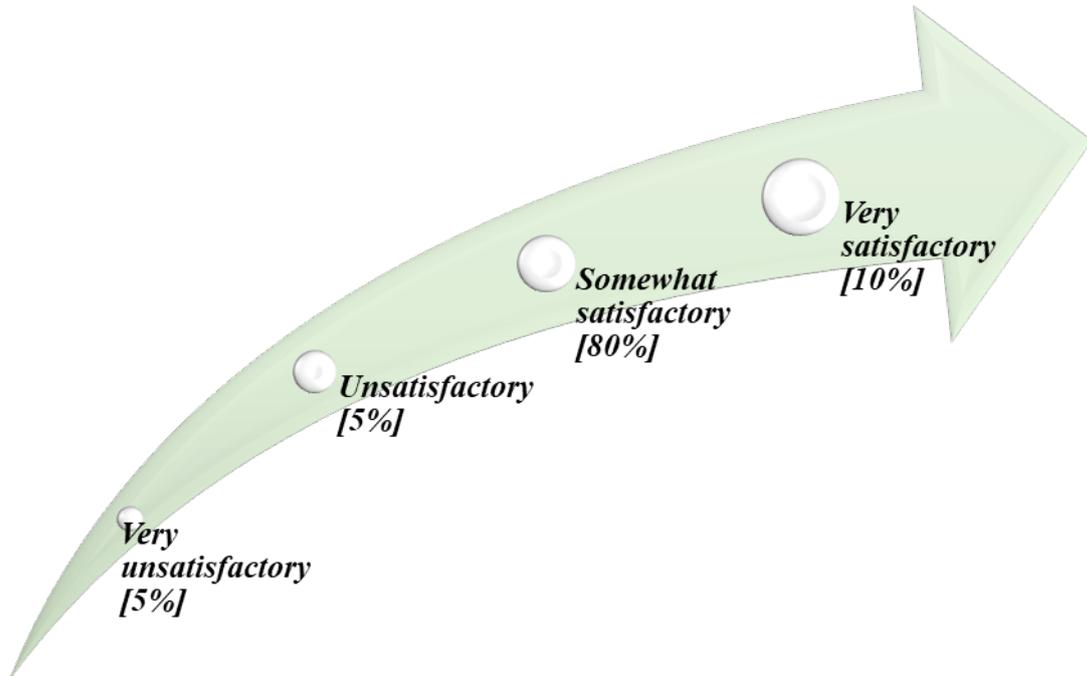
**Are you or any of your family members allowed to continue public education in Trinidad and Tobago?**



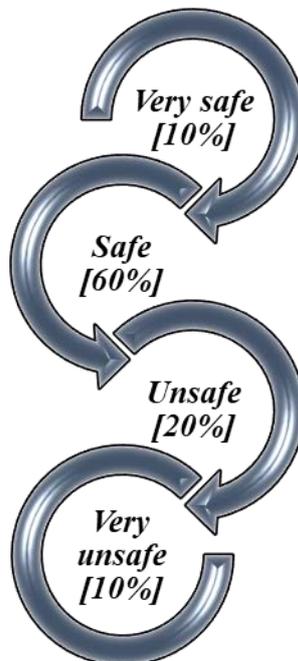
**Do you have access to public healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago?**



**If you indicated yes to the previous question, what is your level of satisfaction with the healthcare provided?**



**How safe do you feel in Trinidad and Tobago?**



### **Appendix 3:**

#### ***Interviews***

##### **Interview 1**

##### **Keith Sampson**

##### **Immigration Officer at Immigration Division of Trinidad and Tobago.**

**Shivani Matoo (SM):** Interviewing Mr. Keith Sampson for the thesis An Examination of the Success and Failures of Policies Implemented by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to accommodate Venezuelan Migrants. To begin, can you give an approximation on the number of Venezuelan migrants registered so far in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Keith Sampson (KS):** As of June 2019, the registration process registered 13,933 Venezuelans. The period ended on Friday 13th June, I'm not sure I can remember the exact time that the process ended, but the Minister of National Security and the Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley along with others involved were present. The Prime Minister indicated that at whatever time it was carded to end that night...I believe it was 5 o' clock in the evening.... that would be the end of the registration period. Yet I remember there were still hundreds of Venezuelans still waiting when the period ended that day. Nevertheless, from June 2019 till now, the end of 2020, I would probably give an estimate of 16,000 Venezuelans.

**SM:** What became of those Venezuelans who were still waiting to be registered after the deadline?

**KS:** They received a dated number which allowed their process to be completed at another date. Those persons at the end of the line on the registration date were identified and acknowledged and registered in the exercise at another date.

**SM:** What would you say is one of the most vital policies put in place by the government to accommodate the Venezuelans?

**KS:** Well, the government implemented a work permit program lasting at least 1 year to efficiently manage migrant labor. The proposal came from economist Valmiki Arjoon who pointed out the presence of some 16, 000 Venezuelans or so in this country was a perfect compliment for the government's diversification thrust.

**SM:** What prompted the proposal of the work permit program?

**KS:** Um, there are many migrants who stand who have won their clearance to work in this country, but they have become the target of unethical employers. All they're doing here is working and working and working, and many of them are being underpaid at the same time. This is no quality of life; I mean come on, Trinidad and Tobago, we...we're supposed to hold ourselves higher than this. I believe the structured work permit program is necessary. Many of these workers have the skillset.

**SM:** Would you say the government has done its part in accommodating the migrants?

**KS:** We definitely have done more than most countries when it comes to the Venezuelan crisis. Take for example, the US. They are encountering issues with their own migration crisis. They have the same problem that we have, thousands of migrants rushing your borders, wanting to come into your country because they see a greener grass on your side than on their side. That immigration crisis is definitely a political problem in America...but the US has the necessary resources to accommodate the migrants! Compare that to Trinidad. A little Caribbean nation like Trinidad and Tobago...we have approximately 16 000 Venezuelans authorized now to be within our borders and we treat them like human beings.

**SM:** If I remember correctly, the US criticized Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the Venezuelan crisis management and drug-trafficking and human-trafficking. What has been the government's response to that?

**KS:** The government continues to work assiduously to counter trafficking. I am aware of the recommendations made in the report specific to Trinidad and Tobago such as expanding victims' screening and victim services, increasing training on trafficking for non-governmental organizations and shelter staff, and further increasing efforts to investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers. The Ministry of National Security assured that its Counter-Trafficking Unit, CTU, continues to work steadfastly and in collaboration with partnering agencies, NGOs and civil societies to increase public awareness and to reduce incidents of trafficking in persons.

**SM:** What are your comments with regards to health care and the Venezuelans?

**KS:** The policy for treating not just the Venezuelans, but all non-nationals with respect to public health care services is being carried out. Health care services are provided to all non-nationals. These services include emergency medical services, immunization and treatment of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and other high-risk infectious diseases. There is no place for discrimination or stigmatization when it comes to health.

**SM:** Would you say the policies put in place to deal with migrants are efficient enough?

**KS:** Trinidad and Tobago is doing all it can for Venezuelan migrants. I mean, we took in about 16,000 thousand migrants. They could get jobs, they are provided with security, and basic health care. We have taken in a large number of migrants from Venezuela more than any other country has done, and of course we empathize with them and we are sharing what we have with them.

**SM:** Would you say that the Venezuelans are finding safety and security here in Trinidad?

**KS:** With respect to the Venezuelan migrant registration scheme, the process which I mentioned to you earlier, Minister Young instructed to give an automatic six month extension to the original six month duration to contribute as an employee of the country. More would have been done if the government had sufficient resources and infrastructure to accommodate the migrants, but we are really trying our best to accommodate them by allowing them to seek residence in Trinidad and Tobago, so yes, I will say that they are finding safety and security here.

## Interview 2

**Rochelle Nakhid**

**Coordinator of Living Water Community's Ministry for Migrants and Refugees**

**Shivani Matoo (SM):** Tell me a little about your Non-Governmental Organization. What are your visions with regards to the Venezuelan migrants?

**Rochelle Nakhid (RN):** We want to highlight the importance of social cohesion and recognize generosity in supporting migrants. To us, migrants are champions of resilience, when times are tough. They have played such a critical role in society.

**SM:** How has the Living Water Community contributed in accommodating the Venezuelans?

**RN:** We are helping these people who are fleeing from the social, political and economic crisis in Venezuela. In Trinidad, we are providing a safe space for them to live, where they can join a society and rebuild their lives. Any donations that we receive are contributed towards medicine, clean water, food, and shelter for families and children. The Living Water Community received a major boost in our effort to help Venezuelan refugees after we were awarded special grant funding from the United States' government.

**SM:** That's very generous and commendable of the NGO. Now, with regards to education, the government and Trinidad and Tobago has denied access to public education towards Venezuelan migrants and children. Living Water Community, however, has been praised for providing access to education for Venezuelans. Is this true?

**RN:** Yes, it is. We have partnered with UNCF (United Nations Children Fund), and because of this, we were able to provide electronic devices like tablets to some 600 Venezuelan migrant children so that they can pursue their education while in Trinidad and Tobago. These devices

are useful in a learning environment, especially now that Covid 19 is restricting face-to-face interaction. We are currently trying to liaise with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) on how we can better integrate learning for Venezuelan migrant children, and we are also trying to convince the government to allow mainstream education in public schools for them. Living Water Community, along with the La Romaine Migrant Support Group, have been hosting free classes for migrant children.

**SM:** What are your comments with regards to employment available to the Venezuelan migrants?

**RN:** There are just over 16 000 Venezuelans who registered to live and work legally in this country for a year, following the government's registration amnesty exercise. Many of these migrants come with their children and babies, searching for a better life. I must say that the work permit program implemented by the government is a great way to start...it allows migrants to work for a period of 1 year. But, it's very sad to see that Venezuelan workers are being exploited by their employers. Venezuelans...they are willing to do work, willing to do labor that our own Trinidadian people are not willing to. That is because they will go to any lengths to earn an income, whether that is working the fields under the hot sun day and night, or whether that is gratefully accepting a low pay for overtime hours, they will do it. Employers promise work and after one week, Venezuelan workers are not paid. Employers keep migrants working from 6 am to 10 pm in the night with nothing to eat. It's very, very sad. And for female migrants, it's even worse. They are sometimes forced into prostitution or sexually exploited by employers.

**SM:** Do you think the governments' policies towards migrants are effective?

**RN:** Um.... aha, I - I would say that some of the government's policies are effective, I mean, the registration and work permit program they implemented has been very helpful, but I think

there are lots of areas that are being ignored, areas that need investigating and looking into, like the lack of access to education for example. But I understand that you know, as a little country, we can't keep up resource-wise with the demands and needs. I think the country is just underprepared to deal with such a large influx of Venezuelans. Living Water Community is doing the best it can, we are being relied on by the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to facilitate asylum registration, and to identify and refer people who may need protection.

